

*Serial  
Pov.*  
NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY  
TO CHILDREN.



# BABY-FARMING.

BY

BENJAMIN WAUGH.  
THE

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**Telegraphic Address :—“Childhood, London.”**

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*The Object of the Society is the prevention of the cruel treatment, wrongful neglect, or improper employment of children; also all conduct by which life, or limb, or health, is wrongfully endangered or sacrificed, or by which morals are imperilled or depraved. Such objects are pursued by (a) remonstrance and moral suasion; (b) enforcement of existing laws; (c) promotion of any amendment of the law that may be proved to be necessary or desirable.*

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## BABY-FARMING.

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“DON’T cry ; oh, don’t cry !” pleaded a frail boy with outstretched hands, sitting up, asleep, in bed, in the night, dreaming. He often did so ; the tears rolling down his pained blanched face, as if he would restrain companions from suffering. He had been got from a house, where night and day he had the chief care of six cold, sore, wailing, hungry babies, all younger than himself, all unwanted, all nearing the time of their departure, a small batch of that mournful tale of 54,000 children annually born in the land who ought not to have been born. He was dreaming it over again.

If a process could be invented, by which stories of the invisible and hateful things done to these children could be brought to light, as a certain solution, known to the experiments of my boyhood, brought out writing in invisible ink, the nation would not hesitate to pronounce them the darkest, most ghastly shame in the land. Yet is it the work of a trade, doing a brisk business, known by the mild name of the “Baby Farm.” Even the student of heathen history may fairly challenge “Christians,” as all Englishmen are called, to find amongst its horrors anything done to children which provides a parallel to it. While cannibal mothers, when an unwanted child is born, are said “to put it back again” in a meal, English mothers put their unwanted children back by a process of which the cannibal would be ashamed, but which, happily for the comparison, her eye does not actually see. The responsibility lies with a trade which has grown up, and is in full swing in the land—the undertaker for the unwanted baby’s death.

To apply such a disclosing solution as we have supposed to these baby institutions, has been attempted by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. This much of the history of its investigations may be stated. It selected a certain number of “adoption” announcements in newspaper advertisements, and, under suitable cover, attempted to bring up from beneath their composing appearance, the truth of them, with a view to place it before the heart and conscience of Parliament, for Parliament to apply regulations to it.

Before stating what those regulations must be, let us set out the nature and magnitude of the trade to be regulated.

There seemed to be an impression that of late years baby-farming had gone down ; that since the Infant Life Protection Act was passed, things were better. It was my own impression that the trade was still as large and as bad as ever, though it was more skilfully con-

ducted. Where permitted, the Society has carried out its inquiry beyond correspondence into interviews with the advertiser in person. But, even then, it has not always been allowed to see her home, and never has it been able to see the place which many considerations rendered it certain would be the destiny of the sought-for child. None but those who have attempted such wretched and delicate inquiries into a secret trade can imagine the number and magnitude of the difficulties which, at every step, barred the way. While definite knowledge was occasionally obtained, generally it has been possible only to form opinions, the opposite of which would be laughed at as absurd by any sane mind. And knowledge and opinion, confirmed by independent and numerous lines of evidence, make it certain that behind these "country air and mother's love" advertisements live a band of cruel dastards who take children as mere means of gain which can only be made by their death.

To avoid injustice, let me say that advertisers are not all alike. They consist partly of undoubtedly good ones, where a child to adopt is really wanted, for joy in children; partly of doubtful, where a "living" is the chief motive; and partly of vile and criminal people, who deserve the uttermost vengeance of the law. These are mere procurers, obtaining not one child, but child after child, in prodigious numbers, getting rid of them to receivers.

When found, the procurer is mostly of clean, genteel, respectable clothing and manners. She often professes that she has been married three, five, or seven years, has had "no child," and is "anxious to adopt one from the birth." She wants something to compassionate and to love. For the receiving of the baby an appointment is usually made at a railway station, from which (when negotiations are successful) a wire to one of her receivers simply announces that she is on the way. Her business is to snare; her receiver's is to slay.

Here is the goal to which one skilful and busy procurer had conveyed five of her little victims. It was the back room of a tumble-down labourer's cottage, scarcely fit for a coal place, about twelve feet square. Crouching and sprawling on the floor, in their own excrement, were two of them. Two were tied in rickety chairs, one lay in a rotten bassinet. The stench of the room was so abominable that a grown man vomited on opening the door of it. Though three were nearly two years old, none of them could walk, only one could stand up even by the aid of a chair. In bitter March, there was no fire. Two children had a band of flannel round the loins; one had a small shawl on; the rest had only thin, filthy, cotton frocks. All were yellow, fevered skin and bone. None of them cried, they were too weak. One had bronchitis, one curvature of the spine, and the rest rickets; all from their treatment. There was not a scrap of children's food in the house. In a bedroom above was a mattress, soaked and sodden with filth, to which they were carried at night, with two old coats for

covering. All the children's clothes in the place were the handfuls of rags they wore. And a man and his wife sat watching them die of filth and famine, so making their living. It was their trade. Of one, which had died a few months before, was found a graceful memorial card, with the motto, "He shall gather them into his arms," which had been provided for the procurer who sent it. At the farm, its mother was not known. These five weary creatures were all removed into restorative care: all injured for years; some for life. Two never recovered and died in hospital.

This was the destiny of the babies which had been lured from disgrace-driven, perhaps loving mothers' arms to their procurer by such pathetic pleas as "Married seven years and no child," and which had been received by her at some railway station with her prettiest, most deferential grace. It was while the Society was on its ordinary prevention of cruelty work that it came upon this place of slow and sure slaughter, and was able to connect it with a pious advertiser in a religious paper.

Another "farm," kept by a man and wife, consisted of one small room occupied night and day by six persons—the two adults and four children. In a cradle on the bed was a child sucking at a bottle. In a cradle by the bed was another suckling. On the bed lay a third. On the floor was a fourth child, and also the man and woman who lived upon savings out of these children's keep. Two of the children were very ill; had been ill for some weeks; one seemed near death. Neither had had medical care. One had raw sores round the eyes, which were explained, "through the beetles getting at it." They were on the body, too. When this child cried (it was "crying all day long," a neighbour said), it was never taken up. This neighbour had seen the man angrily pile clothes on its head to silence it.

I cannot say if these persons take pleasure in the cruelties they practise; but one thing is certain: they are of the sort who have no sympathy with the imploring helplessness of suffering. They would not save an ache to a child in their care if they could do so only by a kiss pressed on its pallid lips, or a folding of it to their breast with their arms. Whatever they might be to their own children—and a she-wolf is good to her cubs—to the children of others they are without the pale of humanity. Baby's dying wailings have no more effect on what they are doing than have a lamb's on what a butcher is doing. It must be done. For this reason, they suit the procurer.

The procurer seems to be the chief advertiser. She lives on the world of women who are mothers through somebody's misconduct, and in despair. The receivers are her business connections. These live by her. She is well in with her set. "Leave here 10 P.M.; expect me three in the morning." "Meet me 2.15." These are two telegrams sent in the same week, by the same procurer, one to a receiver of hers at Swindon, one to another at Yarmouth. One was sent from

Liverpool Street Station, where a child had just been obtained ; the other from Oxford Station, where another had been obtained. Both children were beautifully dressed, and evidently belonged to the upper classes ; one went to the wife of a fish hand, the other to a retired tax-gatherer's wife.

The meaning of the telegrams was well understood. The one was signed "H—l," the other "W—e." Both were from the same person, who traffics under at least four names. After a time we found out who this foul and poisonous deceiver was, and traced her to her home, where her clergyman had no idea of her occupation, and where she had never but one child, which he regarded as her own. She had a nurse-like neatness of deportment and dress, and held a testimonial from a vicar with which the more easily to secure her hapless victims. The explanation of the secrecy in which she had conducted her business was that all her appointments for receiving children were made for distant railway stations within easy reach of some of her receivers. To her were ultimately traced (what more she had had it was impossible to say) four-and-twenty babies, none of whom were in her care, but all of whom in one short year she had received under pretence of adopting them.

Such is the monster, a baby-procurer, publicly carrying on her business, as agents carry on theirs for your governess or clerk ; and (like all agencies) in a manner which those alone who are on the look out for them observe. Her business success depends on secrecy. So timid and wily is she, that under cover which seems incapable of suspicion as to its *bona fides*, you may conduct your negotiations for the transfer of a child to her to within one point of such success as you want, when further negotiations are suddenly declined. Negotiations, not only with one, but with two or three, in different parts of the country, who were supposed to be separate individuals, are abruptly closed at the same time, which suggests that you have been corresponding with the same advertiser, or that there is a union in the procurer's trade, with alertness for common interests. One apologised for precautions, saying that the existence of the Society created great uneasiness in the trade, and rendered them more than ever necessary, and that advertising agents and papers were all "very chary" now.

Judged from the extent of its advertisements all over the country (from which we selected haphazard for our investigation), this baby-procuring is now a prodigious business. We have found the same person's advertisements as far north as Sunderland, and as far south as Eastbourne. They appear very largely in those places of resort which have earned the name "gay," and extend to the resorts of the English on the Continent. At different times the same person advertises in the same paper under different names, one under three, another under four.

If we may ground an opinion of what we do not know on evidence

afforded by what we do know, all procurers obtain their children under false pretences. The statements of their advertisements, their correspondence, their conversations, are mere tissues of lies. Two correspondents, under different names, which eventually turn out to mean the same person, make totally different statements of their circumstances, and whenever by other means you get at the actual facts, both statements turn out to be crafty and misleading inventions. One said that her husband was in a hospital for an operation, which left her temporarily without income. The same one said that she was a widow with one child. Neither statement had the shadow of a foundation. Her husband was a railway-carriage builder in good pay and regular work, and she was childless. Another said she had only one little girl, four and a half years old ; the rest of her children had all died at birth. With an air of consistency, she wrote on the deepest mourning paper. She was found to have ten living children, an invalid husband, and much trouble as to ways and means. Wherever it has been possible to get through the precautions as to personal identification and real dwelling of the procurer and to test statements by facts (as the mothers of the children have no means whatever of doing), unfavourable appearances have been explained away by lies.

But false pretences are not always necessary. For instance, two of the children in the large piggery already described had been obtained by the keeper of it herself. She advertised, "Wanted a child to adopt by a respectable married couple ; premium required ; apply, &c." The address given was that of an accommodating acquaintance five miles away from the advertiser's own miserable den. She inserted her advertisement twice in a London and twice in a Birmingham paper ; and with no more knowledge of her than this, two living babies were made over to her, one from Havre, one from Edgbaston. In neither case did the mother of the child see the advertiser's house. The Havre child, she fetched from Southampton. It was "a regular lady's." The other, she met on the platform at Snow Hill Station, Birmingham. These brief advertisements brought her one £10 and one £20 from persons who knew nothing of her, and did not know even her name or address. All the correspondence there had been was as to terms. The children were never to be seen again.

Far is it, alas ! from being always necessary to deceive mothers in order to secure their children's charge. There are infamous creatures, mere she-things, who look out for foul and dishonourable people to consign their children to. Such was the following. The accommodation she found for her two children, and for two other children, and three adults, consisted of two rooms, one living-room and one bedroom. In the bedroom was one bed, for her two and the two other children, and three adults. When the place was entered, the only children's food in it was a bowl of putrid bread and milk. Her children had sat daily in chairs till their thighs were now horribly raw with the wood of the chair and

their own filth. A chemise or a night-gown was their only clothing. They were now ill, and had lain for days unmoved on pillows, cold, wet, sodden with filth, and creeping with maggots, a piece of sacking over them. Twelve shillings a week the mother paid for them. She periodically visited them, and saw their deadly whiteness, their shrinking lips, their protruding teeth, the dry, hot, weary anguish in them. One died; still the mother visited and saw the other. She visited up to the last. Her children were in this place, wilfully put there one after the other, both being taken away from excellent care to be so. We saw the man of the place. He had the wild eye and restless brain of a hard spirit-drinker, who cared nothing for the rights of a nurse baby, and less than nothing for the wrongs of his wife. He was thirsty, sullen, overbearing, mad; with mind and will and craft enough to have his way. His wife was pitiable, crushed, and dissipated.

Far be it from me to suggest that any large proportion of husbandless mothers deliberately seek such a shambles as this. Many a one sells clothes, trinkets, and watch, and taxes all her small resources to the uttermost to secure ample, if possible, handsome attention to her child. To be bound to part with it for good is bitter enough price to pay. Speaking of the baby to be disposed of to "a respectable married person" advertiser, one letter the Society got possession of says, "I cannot afford the £40 at once, I will give you £20 now, and £20 in a year. Were you to see her, I think you would say she is something to be proud of. I should like to be allowed to come and see her." Another says, "The little one is very engaging. I should wish her to have a plain education, and to be brought up in the Protestant religion. I will, of course, give up all claim to her, but should like to hear how she is. I shall find it hard to pay you." Could such a mother dream of the kind of fate to which she was consigning her little one, a thousand times rather would she go to the bottom of the sea with it.

As we are not reflecting on unhappy mothers, it can be no sort of answer to any plea for baby-farm regulation to say that they often part with their babies in good faith. The plea rather gathers strength from the fact. Granting that even the great mass of farmed children are obtained from mothers, honestly making the best arrangements they can for baby's welfare, then the plea for regulation primarily urged in the interest of the baby is clinched by considerations in the interest of the mother. She and her little means ought to be delivered from the possibility of such horrible frauds as, by all lines of investigation it is made clear, are now practised on her. I, for one, have no stone to throw at this torn, wits-driven class of woman. I have tears for her. The victim of a trust, maybe, for which there was no foundation, she has become an unhappy mother. In the name of God and humanity, let us relieve her of the chance of being also an unwitting murderer.

The creatures who exist to obtain her child are known to her only by advertisement, a testimonial-letter from a minister of religion, and a hasty glimpse at a railway station while the train stops—her veil down in an agony of fear lest some one on the platform may see her, who knows her. She never supposes that this woman is a mere procurer for some other person.

The price for the absolute disposal of a child varies greatly. On a shrewd guess as to the position of the persons—father as well as mother, if possible—who have to escape disgrace, the procurer puts out feelers and makes demands accordingly, from £5 for servants to £200 for genteel people. It is incredible to what lengths of confidence she will go when she no longer doubts that she has found somebody as knowing and as bad as herself, and sees a round sum of money in it. One who advertised, “A respectable married couple want charge of a baby, or to adopt,” in conversation, with the greatest simplicity and straightforwardness refused £25 with child and £25 at death, on the ground that she had “better offers than that.” She would take £60. She had been able, she said, to refer to her clergyman till lately, but she had given up going to church and gone to chapel, because the curate had asked if the last child she had was not “born in sin.” Another, who advertised, “Happy home for a little child, with every care and attention; nice house and very healthy,” agreed, also in conversation, to receive £100, the child to be dead in three months, adding, “The sooner I have it the better.” Another, who put her proper and full name and address in her advertisement—and, to the paper she advertised in, gave her vicar as reference—undertook that for £50 a lady’s child should not be born alive, adding, “It is easily done; the easiest thing in the world.”

For the peace of mind of those who may recognise themselves in these statements, it may be worth while to say that on no consideration shall they be informed against. We wanted to know what people in their profession would do for a consideration, and we learnt it. That was all. Besides, we have neither the documents nor the witnesses which would be required for the technical ordeal of a witness-box.

Whilst such positive undertakings could seldom be got, and least of all documentary evidence of them; the effect of what was got was to leave no doubt that the profession of desire for a baby for love of a baby was dishonest. The advertiser wanted money, not babies; and that got, baby might go to the grave as soon as was safe. To all the facts of the case no other meaning could be given.

It may be well to state some of these meaningful facts. There was an air of humbug about most of the procurers wholly inconsistent with the reality of “want of a child to love, had none and were lonely,” &c. Moreover their statements as to “no child” were frequently discovered to be false. Here is a report on one forwarded by the police of the town the woman was traced to:—“Mrs. —— has been in this town but a short time, and in consequence of the close manner in

which she keeps, &c. . . . She has a child of five of her own, and other children not her own, and I may think it necessary to communicate with respect to them." Whilst almost none had ever "adopted a child before," when terms were proposed they unwittingly let out that they had "been paid better than that." One of the most satisfactory of these "never-before" people advertised through a London agency, through which we learnt that she advertised much, but preferred London to country papers because she "got children easier through them. One had just died and she wanted another." Asked why, with three children of her own and evidently enough to do to keep them, she wanted another, she said, "I don't want any more of my own, but my husband and I are so fond of a baby." Before the interview closed she showed quite a student's acquaintance with fatal and safe ways of baby-feeding. Another of them would take a child for £30, but would not give her address because she said her husband was so afraid of "having a child taken away." They had "been done that way before." One wishing to dispose of a child wrote a letter to a would-be receiver, as the husband of a newly made mother too ill to be allowed to know of the birth of her child. "Doctor thinks she will pull through"—immediate care wanted. The writer was a woman, in good health, travelling about, who wrote her letter in London, posted it at Leamington, and lived elsewhere. The child had just been procured from a private lying-in establishment.

The difficulties in the way of getting behind the advertisements has been immense, but wherever the effort has been successful almost all the statements, quite all the material ones, have proved to be useful lies. Many of the addresses intended to be regarded as the advertisers' own were those of other persons. Some were of shops, where letters were received for a penny. One "respectable married person," who wanted to adopt, had a restraint warrant in her house for rent. Some professing to be married were found to be single. And as for evil suggestions, most of them would listen without effect to what no honest person could have heard without shame and protest.

These wretched conclusions as to the procurer's trade, made certain as to particular individuals by definite knowledge, are confirmed by the multitudinous cautions, and wilinesses, and deceits of those who are in it, and by the bits of dark knowledge and experience implied in so much as they unwittingly let drop. Whatever doubt to the contrary such evidence might leave, is removed by the discovered circumstances of some of these longers for a child. One aged person had an aged husband, asthmatical, had fits, was hard up for daily bread. She would take a child for good and all for £10. Another was the wife of a working bootmaker. Another was a dressmaker who had lost her sight. Another was a coal-yard labourer, who had a chance of buying his master's business if he could raise money by Christmas. He had had several "adopted" children; they were all dead. He was still £10 short

to pay for the horse and cart. His wife would adopt for £10. They were really buying a coal business by adopting. Another was a stevedore's wife, out of work. Another was a bankrupt farmer's wife: another, a monthly nurse, who had lost her engagements through drinking.

Of course, the mere procurer does no ill. Her procured children go to receiving houses to be "done for," where in ones, twos, and threes, generally under false names, they remain till they die. The procurer keeps the birth certificate. At an inquest she may be required to furnish it to the coroner, when she produces one wholly regardless of its being the right or wrong one, caring only not to give one which, if the papers make it public, will be likely to get her into trouble. At the receiver's, behind the ordinary screen of an English house, and the great liberties allowed to everybody in the treatment of children in it, without attracting anybody's attention, the child is slowly changed from a bonny baby into a skin and bone corpse. One procurer, however, declared her preference for over-feeding; it was just as fatal as starving. When deaths at a "farm" have attracted attention and remark, or some accident has brought its treatment of children to light, the "farmer" removes. One woman carried on her business in three different places in one year and eight months. In another case, when suspicion had been aroused, a dying child was removed from one house to a second, and a third, and a fourth in eight months. Where it died it had only been a few days. When there has been a conviction for neglect in one place, it does not count in another. It is not known. Where the neglect is continued, and brings death in the place removed to, there is no presumption against the "farmer." About the experienced masters in the craft, there is the quiet canniness of the devil.

One large and lucrative baby-hunting ground is police-court affiliation cases where "quality" is concerned, and which get into the papers. In one month we came across three children attempted to be captured in this field.

Besides the advertising procurer, there are procurers among the sort of women usually engaged at the birth of these illegitimate—low-class monthly nurses and midwives, nurses at workhouses, and keepers of lying-in houses—most of them probably helping the mother out of her "trouble," not for gain, yet sending to houses which exist for gain. When indirectly asked to see to a child being born dead, one of this last class of persons, not in the least discomposed by the request, replied: "We dare not do that; we never know how a lady will feel to her baby till she's a mother. We prefer to deliver and 'provide.'" He would be an idiot who did not see that to such an audacious woman the two courses meant practically the same thing—the child's death; the choice made was for her own safety.

Here is a "farm" to which a servant, whose child was born in a workhouse, was referred by her nurse there. Its keeper had once

been a nurse herself, but drink had brought her down. Our attention was called to it by a young Member of Parliament, to whose wife's baby the mother had become wet-nurse. On the floor of the small fifth-story room of which it consisted was a wretched stinking, black flock-bed. It had no covering of any kind. There was one chair in the room, and a chest of drawers. The place was damp and sour. It was nearly ten o'clock on a February night. There was no fire, neither was there any one in. The owner was traced to a gorgeous drinking den, where one child of a year old slept on the floor at her feet by the bar, the other, a few months old, which was the child we were seeking, lay on her knee, with protruding eyes staring at the gas. Both children were mere skin and bone. "I myself chose the mother to nurse our boy," said the M.P., "because of the magnificence of her baby." Scarcely seven months had gone, and this was the plight it was in. Seven shillings a week were those who had taken from it its mother paying for it, that the strong little thing might be done well by. When the revolting woman was asked if she had got this child from S——, sullenly she said "Yes." To "How has it come to be like this?" she muttered, "It's no appetite." Judging by her evident skill in providing to meet the legal requirements of safe baby-killing, she was no novice at her deadly trade. She had two dispensary tickets, one for each child. She was "all right" for "certificates." Besides which precautions she had lived in five districts in five months. Her den was a landlord's "furnished" room.

Large numbers of old women, it may be added, take in a single child at a time, to provide them with tea and snuff.

It was a true instinct which called these institutions "farms." They are comparable with sheep farms, whose motive is fleece and flesh which can be turned into money on which the farmer keeps his family and "gets along." How long his sheep shall live is wholly a question of money-profit. In a home it is precisely the reverse of this. There, a child is valued as food for man's nobler emotions, and to build up character, for which the pocket is gladly taxed, often deeply drained. Watchful, painful love defends it from dangers; its safety and health being the only reward. The mother gives her life for her sheep; the farmer gives his sheep for his life.

No desperate expedients are necessary in this cruel business. For little human lives, frail and dependent, neglect furnishes an easy, smooth and safe incline to the grave; and the "farmers" know it. Talk of ways of feeding and they will show you how well they understand that a grown child's food is a baby's poison. Talk of syrups and laudanum, and they will cautiously smile assent. Talk of opportunities for letting die, and they will take refuge in cant and a sigh. "If it should please God to take it, it will escape all the trials of the world, and be better off," said one. Not an uncommon creed, yet for

all that not the less a creed of the devil. Medicines can be procured for diseases the child has not got. Insufficient clothing on bitter nights will bring on ailments ; ailments neglected will end in death. It is as easy to get a baby's life out of it as it is to rub off the dust from a butterfly's wing.

By mere neglect, the odds are all against the child living. All children have ailments latent in their constitution. But for patient love and care, the childhood of most of them would be but of few days and evil. The soundest constitutions emerge from cradle and nursery alive only because, happily, in almost every household baby commands these. But in the house of the mere living-maker it is motives of money-profit that reign ; and profit increases by every untended weariness and pain, and is completed by death. Remembering that the receiver's undertaking in the cases we are considering is a commercial undertaking, not one of natural instinct, nor of charity, and that when baby dies it leaves money behind it and room for another to do the same, it is not difficult to form an opinion of baby's chances in her hands. Her house is a social shambles to which the unwanted thing goes as a lamb to the butcher. It is this woman who is largely responsible for the terrible death-rate among these illegitimate, which is permanently 100 per cent. greater than it is amongst all other children, including the children of married poverty and cruelty and vice and crime ; greater far than it is amongst these even when, in periods of most virulent infantile epidemic, it rises to its most abnormal height. Whilst in every thousand of the married-born it is 17 ; of the illegitimate, it is 37.

If the manner of the destruction of these little human things were that of the destruction of our unwanted dogs, or even that once employed in the destruction of babies on the Ganges, outraged humanity would have less to say. But it is neither by the lethal chamber, nor by the short pain of the crocodile's jaws, that they follow one another out of life. It is by methods infinitely more cruel than these.

The deadliness of the receiver's house is the same whether she takes weekly payments or lump sums down. Idleness and bankruptcy can live on three starving children's payments, for there is a constant succession of unwanted children to be had. One is born every ten minutes of the day and the night, the whole year round.

And there is little check to her foul play.

The child cannot complain ; the police are not informed ; and the neighbours, when they know a little, do not interfere. One, on being asked why she did not tell somebody what she knew was happening, said, " You gets no thanks for interfering for them sort of children."

The system of death certificates is but small security ; as a rule it is none at all. Disease generally supervenes, is named on the certificate, and is enough. Even that is often filled in from the

lips of the woman who, in the cases supposed, knows that her liberty depends on lies easily and safely told. When the child is seen alive by the doctor, the view is generally only a cursory glance at its face, as it lies in "the anxious woman's" arms ; and, under "convulsions," "bronchitis," and a host of other words which mean want of breath, the whole wickedness of the affair is covered up. One woman who had just secured such a certificate paid twopence at a pawn-shop for a clean night-gown to convey the dying thing to the dispensary. It was till then almost always naked ! In most districts there is a doctor who is, as one of the "farmers" expressed it, "not troublesome about certificates." Where there is no respectable registered practitioner of the not-troublesome kind, there is, at least, an assistant, or a non-registered practitioner, or a registered one without integrity, and hard-up, who for a consideration will do almost anything. All this is well known in this shameless trade.

And should all these chances fail this baby-slaughterer, unless she is a born idiot at her trade, it is only she who can supply the coroner's inquest with the material for its judgment. Its criminal verdict, too, is restricted to manslaughter, and on the evidence produced that is almost never possible. Failing manslaughter, her conduct is nothing criminal. Besides this limit of the coroner's power, there is the limit of the juror's nature. That the baby they have just seen can have been deliberately made ill and left to die, by that clean, tidy woman before them, so jars on men's usual notion of woman's instincts, that it is dismissed from the jury's mind with something like self-accusation. Even should there be grave appearance to the contrary, it seems impossible. Speaking generally, this juror's instinct has only been overmastered by a *post-mortem* and a two-days' inquiry ; whereas there seldom is a *post-mortem* : it is costly ; and often inquests on babies take only five minutes.

Even to the very last, baby's road to the grave is made safe and smooth. Where, as once in a way it will happen, a charge of "manslaughter" is preferred ; under all the circumstances of skilful baby-farming,—the whole matter of character, conduct to her children, and motive of business too, being excluded from the court,—the prisoner is almost sure to escape punishment. It is seldom possible to prove quite enough for such an indictment.

The whole of the conditions of the trade converge on one central conclusion—viz., that we have not yet the means to meet and check the baby-farmer's criminal temptations. She is carrying on her brisk, brutal trade all over the land in comparative safety.

It is not for the purpose of charging coroners and Assize Courts with indifference to the evils of baby-farming that these statements are made, but as collateral support of the plea for dealing with them at an earlier stage. Prevention, as far as may be, is the only remedy which has the shadow of a chance of success.

On two points—viz., the extent of the practice of starving infants, and the frequent escape of the criminals who starve them—I might fortify myself by quoting from the “charges” of Mr. Justice Day at the 1888 Autumn Assize at Bath, and of Mr. Justice Wills at the 1889 Christmas Assize at Derby.

One point more needs to be dealt with.

There is a belief that an Act of Parliament already exists for the proper regulation of these people, the Infant Life Protection Act, 1872. Few Acts are more profoundly misunderstood. It is a pompous introduction to next to nothing. Excluding all infant lives from its protection, except when two under a year old happen to be found together, it leaves to the “farmer’s” mercies a hundred times as many as it even proposes to protect. Its main effect is to teach “farmers” how to escape its provisions and to conduct their business as they like. The man who would have any adequate notion of the nature and extent of English baby-farming, and of the baby sufferings, illnesses, and death produced by the misconduct practised in it, had better not resort to the history of the Infant Life Protection Act. The chief crime made by it, namely, “Unlawfully neglect to register,” cannot be committed by ninety-nine out of a hundred who take in babies for a living, and it is a crime which has, moreover, nothing to do with the horrible iniquities of the system.

Besides, it says nothing whatever to the infamous traffic of the procurer. Assuming that this has attained anything like the magnitude suggested by its thousands of advertisements annually paid for in papers (many papers decline to receive them), it must be admitted that it, too, demands the control of just national sentiment. Procurers as well as receivers must be put under conditions which protect a wretched mother from plunder; and secure an endurable life to the child that that mother commits to their charge. They must be punished for obtaining babies by advertising lies. We have just raised a baby in England to the rank of a dog, we need now to raise it to the rank of a sixpence. To obtain money under false pretences, that is felony; to obtain a baby under false pretences, that must be felony too.

Receivers—drink-ruined monthly nurses, loafing labourers’ wives, and blind old tax-gatherers—to whom the little life that is obtained by the genteel-looking procurer goes, must be forbidden to eke out their own living by eking out a baby’s dying. I use the words eke out advisedly, for in making dying last consists the whole art of keeping liberty and getting gain. We drive the receiver to do this. If avarice uses mercy, and dispatches its little charge with but one short, sharp pang, we hang it. We hanged Jessie King, we hanged George Horton, because, for securing their ends, they did not resort to the slower, safer, and more infamous arts of the crafty “farmer.” They disregarded the plain lesson of the law as to the means to be employed; that was

all—and they are dead. The crafty “farmer” gives heed to it ; that is enough—and she lives and is free. In the name of all that is human, stabbing is kinder than inflicting aches and burning sores, and lasting thirst, and famine, and fits ; and surely, if anybody, the person who deliberately inflicts these, not the passionate user of the knife, ought to be hanged.

One grave objection to what we ask, which is widely entertained, and by the wise and humane chiefly, needs still to be met.

It may be feared that a thorough system of licence and inspection would destroy that secrecy, in which, at present, women stricken with shame are able to bury it, and so save their whole life from absolute ruin. To do that were cruel, unjust, and unreasonable. But widely considered, this very proper dread is wholly on our side, and greatly strengthens the argument for supervision. Hitherto, these English black holes of Calcutta have been beyond the reach of the humane. To-day, by 52 & 53 Victoria, chap. 44, they may be entered. As the new public sentiment extends, becomes acquainted with its powers, and, armed with those powers, is watchful on behalf of children, the misconduct of baby-farmers may play a part in bringing happily buried scandals and personal miseries to light, which for everybody's sake had better sleep. Whatever may have been the case in the past, in the future, everything that tends to encourage the ill-treatment of an unwanted child must tend to the exposure in courts of all persons connected with its disposal and birth. In five cases (over which we had no control) these unhappy particulars have all come to light, and got into public print ; one was the buried story of a housekeeper ; one, of a governess ; and one, of a young lady of good family. Through a thousand chances of discovery they had concealed that bitter experience till then. Two other stories of the misconduct of persons, capable of untold anguish, who have given big bribes to baby-takers for silence, are now in my hands. Not a word of them shall transpire. Our Society is not for pillorying wrongdoers. It is for stopping cruelty to children. That done, that is enough.

Danger will not arise from instituting national supervision in this trade. It will arise from leaving the trade as it now is; because baby's dangers have recently become its parents' dangers too. What now can be done to secure baby's health and comfort under a proper “Care of Children Bill,” will also secure its parents from miserable exposure under the Children's Charter in the witness-box of a court of law, and in the police column of our daily press.

For everybody's sake, all round ; for the child's sake, first and above all ; for the mother's and even the father's sake ; for the sake of our own priceless national sentiment of justice and self-respect ; it is urgent that there be made thorough and reasonable regulations for these unhappily greatly needed, and at present shamefully conducted, institutions.

## A NOTE.

HERE is given a story of one of the thousands of advertisements which appear in our newspapers, as furnishing an illustration of what lies behind many of them :—

“ CHILD WANTED TO ADOPT.—Good country home. Small premium.—  
Mrs. C——, B—— S——, M—— M——.”

In February last one F—— H——, then expecting a baby which ought not to have been born, and seeing this advertisement, which was appearing in the *Weekly Times and Echo*, applied to Mrs. C—— at B—— S—— for further information, and received the following letter in reply :—

B—— S——, M—— M——,  
*March 1, 1890.*

DEAR MADAM,—In reply to yours received this morning, I beg to say I do wish to adopt a little one, from birth preferred. There are only my husband and myself, and a girl of sixteen I keep to assist in the house, as I am not so very strong. We had one child, a poor little girl of five, which we lost from diphtheria very suddenly. It was, and still is, a very great sorrow to bear; and we thought that, by taking some little one who wanted a home, we should be assisting ourselves a little, and also making the child happy. Also it would take away our thoughts a little, and brighten our home. We are both very fond of children. My husband is a very steady man. We have a nice home, and the little one would be well cared for and loved. We had everything that could be bought for our child; and, of course, whatever child we take would have all. Only the distance is about 146 miles. In the event of your coming to any arrangements, you would, perhaps, come about half-way. My terms are £15, paid down; but should you not be able to pay down that amount, would you kindly write me what you can do? I should like to be as fair as I reasonably could. Yours faithfully, E—— C——.

This, as it afterwards appeared, was a wilful misrepresentation of the woman's circumstances, inasmuch as at the time she expressed her anxiety for the adoption of a child “to brighten her home” and receive her “undivided care and love,” stating that there were “only herself, husband, and servant” in the house, there were besides four other children, for all of whom there was a two-roomed cottage; and the child alluded to as her own—as having died “very suddenly,” and whose death was a “very great sorrow,” was not her own, but an “adopted” child—of parents unknown to her, which she received with a sum of money at the Midland Railway Station in London. She received a reply to this almost wholly false letter, in which, amongst other things, satisfaction was expressed at the happy prospect for the child; but as the £15 down at once was said to be a hard matter, Mrs. C——, wrote again to F—— H——, as follows :—

B— S—, M— M—,  
March 4, 1890.

DEAR M— H—,—In answer to yours received yesterday, I beg to say I would much rather take much less, say £10, and have it paid down and settled at once, if it is possible for you to do so. It seems to me a very unsatisfactory way of taking a little one to be paid for by instalments. It would be like putting it out to nurse. If you pay me that way, I think £20 a very moderate sum, paid at the rate of 5s. per week, or £3 per quarter. I have made inquiries, and find it is usual to ask any sum from £20 up to £50, and even more, so you will know I have asked a moderate sum. It is really not much more than you would pay for a year's nursing. Think it over, and let me know if you can get the £10. You say, do I mean to adopt entirely? Yes, to bring up just the same as though it were born to me. You would give up all claim to it for ever. All your care and anxiety would cease when I took the child. I should have its future in my hands to provide for, so that I think it is worth a little effort and sacrifice on your part to comply with if you can. Another thing you mention is, could you see the baby at some time? I would much rather you did not. If I take it, I shall like to feel it is my very own. If you were to come and see it, I should always feel you had the first claim, and I should not like that. You know you cannot part with it and have it as well. At the same time I always feel sorry when I hear of such cases as yours, as I know only too well what it is to part with one's child. I hope yours will be a strong, healthy boy, and should we have it, and you have no choice in the matter, we should like it to be named Harold if a boy, and Daisy if a girl. I think P— a nice place to meet at, and as nearly half-way as possible. Say if it will suit you. R— is about thirty-four or thirty-six miles from M— M— I am not certain to a mile, but it is very near that. I think I have answered all you asked me. It only remains for me to say if the little one comes to us, it will have a good home, and be well cared for. Will you say what part of the month you are expecting? I should like to have something soon. Will you let me have an early reply? Meantime believe me,

Yours faithfully, E—C—.

Note how well an old hand at her trade feigns the simplicities of a novice! "I have made inquiries, &c."

The £10 was agreed to, and the child was delivered by its mother at the P— railway station, with the £10 "to brighten" Mrs. C—'s home and "enjoy her undivided care." E— C— was her assumed name. Her real name was Mrs. S—.

Within a week the child was dead. It died from inflammation of the lungs. It was in a very emaciated condition, and, though six weeks old, weighed only 4lb. 1oz. The woman S—, when questioned at the inquest, said she had taken to this business on her own account in consequence of being in debt. She had been married eight years, had no children of her own, and used the name of C— for advertising purposes. The children then in her house were from London, Leicester, Leeds, and Norwich. Four of them were illegitimate, and she had "adopted" them all but one. For that she was receiving five shillings a week; with the others she was paid sums down when they were given to her. The largest sum she had received with a child was £15. (But a coroner's jury might sit for ever and not get even a glimmer of the truth of such women's doings.) The mother, who was present, said she gave up the child to the woman S— absolutely and with the understanding that she was not to see it again. She had, however, been thoroughly deceived in the matter, for had she known there were other children in the woman's house she would not have corresponded with her. Her child had been obtained from her by false pretences.

The jury returned a verdict of death from "natural causes."

Mrs. S—— is of genteel aspect and writes in good style. She claims to be the wife of a Midland Railway porter of that name, who was formerly in service as footman or under-butler in the West of London. She says she has been married eight years, but when the man applied for employment on the line six years ago the company were informed that he was unmarried. It is believed that she was also formerly in service, probably as ladies'-maid.

The two-roomed cottage in which she resides at U—— B—— was well-chosen for the business she has secretly carried on there, it being completely sheltered from observation at the rear of other dwellings. Her one small sleeping room was occupied at the time of the death of the youngest child by herself, husband, and five children, aged six weeks, four months, eight months, three years, and five years, four of them said to be illegitimate. At first she admitted to only four children in the house, then she said five, and went on further to say that two others were received and sent away previously, one to near Nottingham, the other to Manchester, and that another had died suddenly. It has been ascertained that the life of that child was insured.

Before the inquest made her business known, her ways had been regarded as very mysterious. She had been seen coming and going, sometimes by last train, with her face veiled, and a bundle (now believed to be a baby). It is said that only just before the death of the last child, a bundle was brought in and afterwards taken away. She had received mysterious telegrams from the railway station, and many letters in both names from the post office, where she gave what appeared to be a satisfactory explanation of the matter when asked to account for the two addresses, and where, as in other parts of the village, no idea was entertained that a traffic in children was going on. Her letters were tissues of falsehoods suited to the circumstances and requirements of her correspondents, whom, according to the custom in her trade, she met at a convenient railway station. Mothers from whom she received children for "adoption" were expected to deliver them up to her absolutely with the understanding, as in the case of F—— H——, that they would never be seen or heard of again. The child brought with her to U—— B—— from London that died last year was given to her with a sum down at Kentish Town Station, and its life was afterwards insured unknown to its mother, who was also unaware of its death and of S——'s whereabouts until she appeared as an inquirer in the village after hearing of the baby farm through the exposure in the papers. The death of her child so "very suddenly" was, of course, a surprise to her. That S——'s neighbours knew nothing of her practices is not to be wondered at, seeing that her cottage home was so conveniently out of the way, and that they, as well as the parents of the children (the servant's mother excepted), were not permitted to be on visiting terms with her—knew nothing of her domestic affairs, how many children were in the house, or how they were treated. Her going out and coming in, "veiled, and with something in a bundle," occasionally, was all they saw of her. It was ascertained at the time of this inquiry that two other baby farmers, named S—— and M——, said to be sisters, and believed to be working with S——, had just left Nottingham and Manchester for London with children in their possession. Mrs. S——, it may be added, at the same time burnt all her letters, and prepared to move to new quarters.

Besides affording a sample of the deceit and safety with which the procurer's trade is carried on, this case is given as a specimen of the "rings" which exist in the trade. When the Society first came into connection with this Mrs. S——'s ring, it was in its Manchester branch, where the Society's purpose was evidently suspected, and communications were subsequently and suddenly dropped by three correspondents at once.

